



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to Statement on Koran Burning in the United States of America

As delivered by Chargé d’Affaires, a. i. Carol Fuller
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
April 7, 2011

We would like to thank the delegation of Kazakhstan for bringing this to the attention of the permanent Council, and we join with you in condemning these heinous acts. President Obama condemned the attack on the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and ongoing strife in the strongest possible terms. We extend our deepest condolences to the families and loved ones of those killed, a total of 24, I understand, as of today. The brave women and men of the United Nations, including the Afghan staff, undertake their work in support of the Afghan people. Their work is essential to building a stronger Afghanistan for the benefit of all its citizens. We stress the importance of calm and urge all parties to reject violence and resolve differences through dialogue.

We have been very clear on our position with respect to the burning of a copy of the Koran. While respecting the fundamental freedom of expression, we condemn such acts as the desecration of a holy text as, in President’s Obama’s words, “extreme intolerance and bigotry.” We are deeply concerned about all deliberate attempts to offend members of any religious or ethnic group or sow division between groups. That said, there is no justification – in any religion or law – for the murder of innocent people! Let me repeat: there is no justification – in any religion or law – for the murder of innocent people, and we categorically reject any rationale for such outrageous actions.

It is disappointing – and, in fact, astonishing – to hear some of our colleagues call for a denunciation of the burning of the Koran and fail to call for a denunciation of the violence and murder of innocent people in the name of religion. The Proclamation of the Pontifical Council for Religious Dialogue, quoted by the Representative of the Holy See, is particularly eloquent on this matter.

We thank the Russian Federation for calling for the criminals responsible for these murders to be caught and punished. We thank the Representative of the Government of Afghanistan for his information on the actions being taken by his Government to this end.

We believe firmly in freedom of religion and freedom of expression. They are universal rights, enshrined in the U.S. Constitution, in the Universal Declaration of the Human Rights and in our shared OSCE commitments. Religious freedom and religious tolerance, as well as freedom of expression, are fundamental pillars of U.S. society.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.